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AUTHOR Powers, David A.; Anderson, Patricia J.
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ABSTRACT

Because North Carolina has the nation's highest percentage of mothers working outside of the home, each of the state's 141 public school systems was surveyed with a 33-item questionnaire to identify existing after school care programs. Responses were received from 138 systems. A total of 48 programs serving 51 systems were identified, and information was gathered on seven aspects of program design and operation, including location, population served, operational policies, program content, personnel, evaluation, and plans for future changes. Survey results are reported and characteristics common to many programs are listed. It is concluded that after school care programming is rapidly gaining acceptance in North Carolina, and that public schools are well equipped to offer such programs. (RH)

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An Examination of After School Care Programs in North Carolina Public Schools

David A. Powers, Ed.D.
Department of Special Education
East Carolina University
Patricia J. Anderson, Ed.D.
Department of Elementary Education
East Carolina University

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Running head: After School Care

Abstract

Educators have become increasingly concerned about the large number of children who must provide for their own care before and/or after school hours. The mounting evidence that at least some of these "latchkey" children are harmed by such circumstances has led many public school systems to develop After School Care Programs (ASCP). Because North Carolina has the nation's highest percentage of mothers working outside of the home, efforts undertaken by this state are of particular significance. Each of the 141 public school systems in North Carolina was surveyed. Based on responses received from 138 of these systems, 48 ASCP were identified. Information is provided on location, population, operational policies, content, personnel, evaluation, and plans for future changes. A review of the literature and a discussion of pertinent issues are also provided.

An Examination of After School Care Programs in North Carolina Public Schools

The term "latchkey" has come into popular use to describe school-aged children who are responsible for their own care before and/or after school hours. Professionals in child development, day care, and public education have become increasingly concerned about this population. This growth in concern appears directly related to two factors: (1) increasing awareness of the large number of latchkey children, and (2) mounting evidence that, for at least some latchkey children in some settings, the effects are potentially negative.

Incidence of latchkey children

Estimates of the number of latchkey children vary depending on how latchkey status is defined. Stroman and Duff (1982), using 1976 Census Bureau data, reported that 2 million (13%) children between the ages of 7 and 13 with working mothers provide their own care before and/or after school hours. Based on figures from the Children's Defense Fund, McCurdy (1985) indicated that 7 million children between ages 5 and 13 are unsupervised during nonschool hours. Elder (1985) indicated that when the 6 to 16 age range is considered, the latchkey population may be as high as 15 million. According to Education Week ("State Chief Urges," 1986), of the 3.6 million children who began school in September 1986, "between one quarter and one third will be

latchkey children with no one to greet them when they come home from school" (p. 14).

Effects on latchkey children

There are indications that some children are affected in negative ways and that, in some cases, these effects are powerful. Long and Long (1982) reported that latchkey arrangements disrupt social interaction between peers and retard the growth of interpersonal skills. Garbarino (1980) described four risks associated with latchkey status, including the risk of children feeling badly, acting badly, developing badly, and being treated badly. Stroman and Duff (1982) reported that the lack of adult supervision "may encourage experimentation with drugs, alcohol and sex" (p. 79). McCurdy (1985) suggested that adolescents are often harmed by lack of after school opportunities and that this "lack of productive activities may even be linked to teen suicides" (p. 17). Hall (1985) described some latchkey children as "virtually prisoners in their own homes" (p. 117) and noted problems of loneliness and isolation. Latchkey children may be, more often than their supervised peers, the victims of sibling abuse and sibling sexual abuse (Huff, 1982). Woods (1972) found that latchkey children have more academic and social problems than those with adult supervision. According to Campbell and Flake (1985), the problems of latchkey children "include crime (especially shoplifting), injury, rape, drug abuse, mental anguish, etc." (p. 381). Long (1984) coined the term "latchkey syndrome" to

summarize a set of characteristics associated with latchkey status. These include "increased fear, a heightened sense of social isolation, a lowered sense of self-worth, resentment toward parents, and a drift toward occupations that, while they might be creative, demand less social interaction" (p. 62).

The public school response

With the realization that self-care may have harmful effects, many public school systems have developed programs to meet the needs of latchkey children. While there is debate about the propriety of public school sponsorship of such programs, it is clear that they are increasing. As public schools respond to latchkey children, After School Care Programs (ASCP) have been among the earliest to develop. These programs provide care for school-aged children after regular school hours. Because the majority of ASCP have been the product of independent initiatives by systems, little is known about program characteristics. This study provides information on the current status of public school sponsored ASCP in North Carolina.

Data on ASCP in North Carolina public schools are of special interest and significance. As can be seen in Figure 1, a larger percentage of women with school-aged children work

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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in North Carolina than in the United States. Figure 1 also illustrates the increase in the percentage of working mothers

with school-aged children in North Carolina from 1970 to 1980. The 1980 North Carolina labor force was 55% women while 43% of the national labor force was comprised of women (Office of Policy and Planning, North Carolina Department of Administration, 1981). With the nation's highest percentage of mothers working outside the home, North Carolina's efforts to respond to latchkey children are of particular importance.

North Carolina public schools and ASCP

A 33-item survey was sent to the 141 public school systems in North Carolina in March 1986. Responses were received from 138 (98%) systems. ASCP were available to children in 51 (37%) school systems. Several systems participated in cooperatively arranged ASCP, resulting in a total of 48 distinct programs serving 51 school systems. The numbers of years of operation for these programs are provided in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Systems not operating ASCP were asked if they planned to do so in the upcoming school year. Of the 83 systems responding, 50 (60%) indicated that they did not; 30 (36%) reported that such programs were being considered. In 3 (4%) systems, plans were underway for implementation.

Those systems not providing ASCP were asked to offer reasons for the absence of such programs. Table 2 lists the most frequently reported reasons. Other reasons mentioned less

Insert Table 2 about here

frequently included insurance concerns, limited administrative interest, transportation problems, overtaxed facilities, and sparsely distributed populations. One respondent indicated that such programs represented an inappropriate role for public schools.

Location and population

Of the 48 programs examined, 46 (96%) were housed in elementary schools. ASCP were assigned a variety of locations within schools. Those most frequently reported were classrooms (79%), gymnasiums (52%), cafeterias (48%), and libraries/media centers (40%).

A total of 6,129 children were served in ASCP. Enrollment by grade level was not available for ten programs. ASCP enrollment data, as reported by 38 programs, are presented in Table 3. Data on enrollment trends indicated

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Insert Table 3 about here

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that the majority of ASCP (71%) were experiencing increased enrollment. Only 3 (6%) programs reported declining enrollment, while 11 (23%) indicated stable enrollment.

Handicapped children were served in the regular ASCP in 57% of responding programs. In 4 programs (9%), these children were served in special ASCP.

Operational policies

Each of the ASCP began services at the end of its school day. ASCP closed at 6:00 p.m. in 67% of the programs and at 5:30 p.m. in 27%. Other closing times ranged from 5:00 to

5:45 p.m. Part-time enrollment was available in 73% of the programs. ASCP operated on teacher workdays in 50% of the programs.

Costs to parents varied significantly. One program reported no charge, while others described "sliding scale" arrangements. Among systems having a set fee, charges ranged from $5.00 to $25.00 weekly. The most frequently reported charge was $10.00 to $15.00 weekly (63%). Most ASCP (85%) reported that their programs were financially self-supporting.

Respondents described a variety of strategies for publicizing ASCP. These techniques included articles in the local newspaper (95%), a school system newsletter (75%), brochures (65%), radio (48%), and television (17%).

Respondents also reported a variety of techniques for distributing ASCP application materials. These included sending forms home with students (77%), enclosing forms in a brochure (42%), distributing forms at parent/teacher organization meetings (38%), mailing forms (25%), printing forms in the newspaper (21%), and distributing forms in a school newsletter (23%).

Transportation represents a complex problem when limited enrollment precludes offering ASCP at each elementary school. ASCP designed to provide service to more than one school must provide a means for transporting children to a central site. Of the systems surveyed, 31% provided such transportation.

Because ASCP operate during hours when other services at the school are not available, provisions for dealing with

emergencies represent an important consideration. Most ASCP had written policies for dealing with emergencies (79%). These included availability of a telephone (94%), availability of student medical information (85%), and first aid training of personnel (50%).

Program Content/Activities

While the majority of ASCP (88%) indicated that a pre-planned schedule governed daily operations, most emphasized that this was loosely structured. Such a schedule was viewed as an appropriate way to deal with children who had already spent a full school day in classroom environments.

Each respondent was asked to indicate activities which occurred each day. Daily activities, and the percentage of respondents reporting each, were: homework (94%), snacks (88%), free play (85%), physical education (75%), tutorial assistance (65%), quiet time (54%), and direct instruction (48%). Noted with less frequency were art, games, crafts, movies, computer work, field trips, special projects, learning centers, and music. Respondents were also asked to report the amount of time devoted daily to each activity. More than one-fifth of each day's schedule was devoted to free play in 54% of the programs, physical education in 29%, and homework completion in 26%.

Survey respondents were asked if teachers sent assignments or requests for tutorial assistance to ASCP. In 37% of the ASCP, a formal procedure had been established for this process.

Respondents were asked to describe special events not scheduled on a daily basis. Of the 46 programs responding, 85% indicated that such events were available. Field trips were the most frequently reported (56%). Others included computers (51%), counseling (33%), gymnastics (33%), career exploration (15%), and foreign language instruction (13%). Those reported with less frequency included 4-H programs, cooking, drama, calligraphy, swimming, band, dance, photography, and publishing. Several programs reported that Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and Daisys met during ASCP hours.

Equipment and supplies available in ASCP included games (98%), art supplies (96%), craft supplies (94%), physical education equipment (92%), books and magazines (92%), audiovisual materials (88%), instructional materials (75%), and computers (50%).

Personnel

Administrative organization and personnel requirements varied with the unique structure of each system. When administrative responsibility was held by personnel in the central office, it was usually the Community Schools Director (48%). The second most frequently reported arrangement (31%) placed the school principal in charge of the ASCP located within his/her facility. Each respondent was asked whether certification was required for ASCP teachers. Certification was required in 23% of the programs surveyed. Almost half of the programs surveyed (47%) utilized volunteers. When asked about parent participation, 54% of ASCP reported at least

occasional involvement.

In 29% of the systems, an advisory board for ASCP was reported. Another 10% had an advisory board which served the community schools program and, therefore, offered input into ASCP operation.

The majority of systems (79%) had established guidelines regarding adult/child ratios in ASCP. Those most frequently reported were 1:15 (39%) and 1:10 (29%).

Program Evaluation

Each program was asked to describe procedures utilized to evaluate ASCP. Evaluation techniques included surveys of parents (33%), teachers (27%), and students (15%). No formal evaluation occurred in 29% of the programs.

Each respondent was asked to rate attitudes of a variety of groups toward ASCP. Table 4 provides a summary of these

Insert Table 4 about here

ratings.

Each respondent was asked to rate six elements of the ASCP and to provide an overall program rating. Table 5

Insert Table 5 about here

provides a summary of these ratings.

Program Planning

Each respondent was asked to characterize plans for the future design and operation of ASCP. Respondents described plans to increase the numbers of students served (81%),

special events (64%), program locations (53%), and the range of grades served (19%). Other changes mentioned less frequently included the intent to operate on a cost effective basis, to implement summer programs, to increase use of community resources, and to survey other grades and schools to determine need. One program planned to reduce the range of grades served. No programs indicated plans to decrease the number of students or the number of locations. Six programs (11%) anticipated no changes.

Discussion

With more than one-third of the school systems in North Carolina providing after school care and with a statewide enrollment in excess of 6,000, it is clear that this state has begun to address the issues associated with latchkey children. While after school care represents a relatively new role for North Carolina's public schools, with 61% having begun operation in the last three years, there are indications that it is gaining momentum. The majority of ASCP reported increasing enrollment (71%). Of those systems not operating ASCP, 40% were considering such programs.

With the majority of ASCP located in elementary schools and the majority of children served in grades kindergarten through three, it is clear that after school care is currently an elementary school responsibility. Such a finding holds important implications, ranging from the preparation of teachers and administrators to the provision of adequate resources and support services.

More than one-half of the programs examined served handicapped students. Handicapped children in latchkey circumstances represent a special concern to both parents and educators. While such children may represent accommodation problems, the availability of ASCP to this population is of particular significance. The negative effects of self-care on handicapped children may be even more pronounced than in the case of non-handicapped youngsters.

Determination of charges for ASCP is an issue with which many systems were having difficulty. The decisions which systems make about program costs are directly related to the issue of accessibility. As ASCP grow, this issue is likely to become increasingly significant. Lower income families must be afforded the same opportunities for ASCP as higher income families. Fixed charges which effectively exclude participation by lower income families may result in poorer children remaining in latchkey circumstances, while children of families of greater means are served. Under such circumstances, ASCP might well become a "middle class experience." The use of income-based "sliding scale" arrangements represents one approach to dealing with this issue.

As reported earlier, 45% of systems not offering ASCP cited prohibitive costs as a reason. With 85% of ASCP financially self-supporting, concerns regarding prohibitive costs represent a questionable rationale for the failure to offer programs. The issue of cost may, however, become a more

important consideration in systems which move toward the use of "sliding scales."

In order to impact upon the latchkey population, systems must offer after school care when families need it. A key consideration in establishing daily closing times should be parent needs for travel time to ASCP. The variability in closing times (5:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.) suggests that each program recognizes the unique characteristics of the community which it serves. Part-time enrollment, an option available in the majority of programs (73%), allows ASCP to address a wider spectrum of needs. Half of the programs did not operate on teacher work-days. Parents of children enrolled in these programs are placed in the difficult position of finding child-care on days distributed throught the school year.

As ASCP become established in schools, program quality may receive increasing attention. While parents may initially be satisfied to have a secure setting for their children, they are likely to quickly concern themselves with program content and quality. Most programs described a loosely structured schedule with much flexibility afforded personnel in managing this schedule. While a variety of events were occurring in ASCP, a small number represent the largest portion of daily schedules. Children were spending most of their time involved in free play, physical education, and homework. With 94% of ASCP involving participants in the completion of homework assignments and with 65% providing tutorial assistance on a daily basis, a substantial amount of time was devoted to

academics. Given this commitment, it would appear that the ASCP should receive information about participants' assignments from classroom teachers. This, however, did not appear to be occurring. Only slightly more than one-third of the programs had established a procedure providing for input from teachers. An opportunity for utilizing ASCP as a mechanism for academic growth was, for the most part, not being realized. It appears, however, that ASCP were utilizing community resources in creative ways. Experiences available to children in ASCP were rich and varied and certainly served to enrich and expand the lives of participants.

The equipment and supplies reported seem appropriate, given the types of activities which dominate ASCP schedules. Of particular note is the finding that one-half of the programs either had a microcomputer located in the ASCP setting, or provided access to one located elsewhere in the school.

A key to the success of any program is the quality of personnel. The second most frequently cited reason for not offering ASCP was concern regarding availability of qualified personnel. While a small percentage of ASCP reported certification as a condition for employment, many indicated that personnel were certified in some area, and most (72%) rated personnel as exceptional.

An area of variation across systems was policy regarding adult/child ratios. While most have established guidelines, the range was substantial (1:5 to 1:25). Variability in this

area will and probably should continue to characterize ASCP. Optimal adult/child ratios vary with specific program characteristics such as the range of ages and grades served. Volunteers in ASCP were contributing in a number of ways. They provided additional supervision, particularly important in programs with high adult/child ratios and/or wide grade and age ranges. Volunteers provided a means for building community involvement in and a sense of shared responsibility for ASCP. The presence of volunteers provided youngsters with increased opportunities for interaction with a variety of people.

Those systems operating ASCP felt very positive about both the program and the perceptions held by others of the program. Those perceived to hold the most positive attitudes toward ASCP were superintendents, parents of students enrolled, and the participants themselves. Program elements most often viewed as exceptional were personnel, administration, and facilities. Those aspects of the program least often rated as exceptional were curriculum, equipment and supplies, and support services. Concerns about curriculum may have reflected the uncertainty which respondents felt regarding program content. With ASCP representing a new and different role for many systems, it is not clear what sort of curriculum, if any, should characterize such programs.

Summary

Based upon survey responses from 138 of North Carolina's 141 public school systems, it was determined that 48 distinct

ASCP serve a total of 51 systems. Data were gathered on seven major aspects of ASCP design and operation. While a good deal of variability characterized each area, the following common attributes emerged.

1. Location. Most ASCP were located in elementary school classrooms.

2. Population. The majority of ASCP were experiencing increased enrollment. Most students participating in ASCP were in grades kindergarten through three.

3. Operational Policies. ASCP typically ended daily operation at 6:00 p.m., charged parents $10.00 to $15.00 weekly, offered part-time enrollment, and were financially self-supporting.

4. Program Content/Activities. Most ASCP had a preplanned, but loosely structured, daily schedule with free play, physical education, and homework completion as major activities. A wide range of special events were made available.

5. Personnel. Most school systems did not require certification of ASCP personnel but perceived current personnel to be performing in an exceptional manner.

6. Evaluation. Most ASCP did not have a formal procedure for program evaluation. ASCP were, however, reported to be perceived in a positive manner by both school personnel and the community.

7. Planning. Most ASCP intended to increase the number of students served. Many intended to increase program

locations.

Conclusions

While after school care programming represents a relatively new role for public schools, it appears that in North Carolina this role is rapidly gaining acceptance. As is to be expected with any developing program, there are questions which remain unanswered. Establishing charges which allow for maximum program self-sufficiency and, yet, provide opportunities for families of lower income to participate, represents a dilemma for many systems. Questions remain regarding program content. What sort of schedule is most appropriate for youngsters who have already spent a full day in classrooms? Should time be devoted to providing assistance to children experiencing difficulty with classroom assignments? If so, what relationship should exist between classroom teachers and ASCP personnel? What characteristics are most desirable in ASCP personnel and should these positions be filled by certified teachers? These questions and others must be resolved through research directed toward defining optimal characteristics of after school care programming.

Perhaps the most fundamental question involves the role which the nation's public school systems should play in the provision of after school care. There are those who argue that the evidence of damage to children left to care for themselves is not conclusive enough to warrant the provision of new programs. It would seem, however, that in a society

which prides itself on child-centeredness, programs must be available until clear evidence exists that children are not harmed by latchkey lives. Public schools are in the best position to offer such programs. As McCurdy (1985) has pointed out, they have the facilities, knowledge, and experience. What remains to be seen is whether they have the commitment.

In a recent article in The New York Times, Janet Elder (1985) reported the results of a survey conducted by the classroom magazine Sprint. Elementary children were asked to describe their greatest fear. The results were both surprising and, for those truly concerned with the well-being of children, upsetting. Over 80% of these children expressed as their greater fear, the fear of being home alone! If we decide not to listen to the researchers, perhaps we should listen to the children.

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Table 1

Numbers of Years of Operation of ASCP

Years of operation	Number of programs	Percent
1 year or less	14	29%
2 years	9	19%
3 years	6	13%
4 years	2	4%
5 years or more	17	35%
	48	100%

Table 2

Reasons Most Frequently Offered for the Absence of ASCP*

Reason	Number of Systems	Percent
Prohibitive costs	31	45%
Limited availability of personnel	29	39%
Concern about conflict with private facilities	25	34%
Limited or no perceived need	15	24%

*Multiple reasons were offered by some systems.

Table 3

Enrollment in After School Care Programs in North Carolina by Grade Level

Grade	Number of students enrolled	Percentage of total ASCP enrollment
Kindergarten	702	22%
First grade	707	22%
Second grade	619	20%
Third grade	515	16%
Fourth grade	329	10%
Fifth grade	230	7%
Sixth grade	62	2%
Grades 7 - 12	3	1%
Totals	3,167	100%

Table 4

Attitudes Toward ASCP

Group	% Negative	% Neutral	% Positive
Superintendents	0	0	100
Parents of enrolled students	0	0	100
School boards	0	6	94
Elementary supervisors	0	8	92
Principals	0	10	90
Teachers	0	22	78
Parents of students not enrolled	0	41	59

Table 5

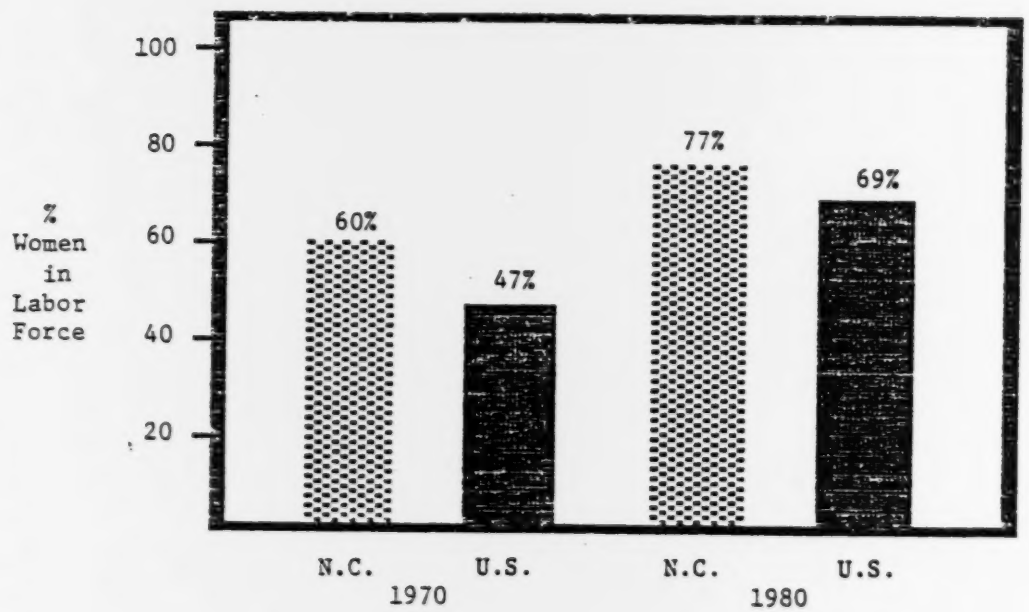
After School Care Program Ratings

Program Elements	Exceptional	Adequate	Inadequate
Administration	59%	41%	--
Curriculum	34%	64%	2%
Equipment/supplies	36%	60%	4%
Personnel	72%	28%	--
Physical facilities	50%	45%	5%
Support services	41%	52%	7%
Overall program	65%	35%	--

Figure Caption

Figure 1

The Percentage of Working Women with Children Between 6 and 17 in North Carolina and the United States


100
80
60
40
20
% Women in Labor Force
60%
47%
77%
69%
N.C.
U.S.
N.C.
U.S.
1970
1980